

Conserving the Future

Progress Report

April 2012

Message from the Chief

Change usually comes slowly, especially in large organizations. For *Conserving the Future*, “usual” just doesn’t apply.

In the two years since we began planning the *Conserving the Future* vision and in the nine months since the vision was ratified, we’ve seen huge changes in both outlook and actions on behalf of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The Refuge System has moved front and center in the conservation consciousness with both the Department of the Interior and the conservation community. Just months after the July 2011 *Conserving the Future* conference, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar established the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area, conserving some of the nation’s last grassland and longleaf pine savanna landscapes. He also announced approval of a 570-acre national wildlife refuge on a former dairy farm just miles south of Albuquerque, NM.

Those actions reflect the bold spirit of the *Conserving the Future* vision and its challenge to the American people to become more engaged as stewards of our nation’s natural resources. *Conserving the Future* is a battle cry for the nation to bring its energy, its ideals and its imagination to solve pressing conservation problems. And people are listening.

People both within and outside government have called the nine *Conserving the Future* implementation teams, asking how they can help with work plans that are demanding, specific and goal oriented. They have been inspired to help make the vision a reality. So have officials in the highest reaches of federal service.

The progress report details a deliberate path to success and new approaches we will take to manage natural resources and engage the public. We invite you to join us on our conservation mission.



Jim Kurth
Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System

Introduction

More than 10,000 comments flooded into AmericasWildlife.org a year ago with thoughts and bold ideas about the future of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Just three months later, in July 2011, over 1,100 conservationists gathered in Madison, Wisconsin, to discuss the final draft of *Conserving the Future* and begin the important brainstorming that kick started implementation. *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation* became available digitally in October 2011, and more than 10,000 paperback copies were distributed in January 2012. As of April 2012, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has nine fully functioning implementation teams and draft work plans for all 24 recommendations. The Service has conducted dozens of meetings with government leaders and partners. The final work plans were published in late April 2012 and posted to the website at <http://AmericasWildlife.org>.

The Service has moved forward quickly since the *Conserving the Future* Conference. The implementation teams submitted work plans that describe tasks and further actions to achieve the recommendations in *Conserving the Future*. The work plans are blueprints for the teams, creating products and deliverables and providing details on approach and timelines. They provide detailed, step-down information about timeframe, coordination needs, communications, training, and evaluation of each product or deliverable. The work plans also include metrics for success and evaluation of effectiveness. They represent a strong body of proposals that will move the Refuge System forward in important ways.

Chapter 1: Conserving the Future, Wildlife and Wildlands

The first chapter of *Conserving the Future* lays out a vision for conserving wildlife and wildlands that will set the Refuge System up for another incredible century of conservation success ([Recommendations 1-10](#)). The work plans for the Planning, Strategic Growth, and Scientific Excellence implementation teams provide step-down details:

- Move the comprehensive conservation planning process for wildlife refuges into a landscape context.
- Set regional and national land acquisition priorities for the Refuge System.

- Develop a climate change implementation plan for the Refuge System that provides guidance for conducting vulnerability assessments of impacts to habitats and species.
- Green the Refuge System infrastructure to meet the Service's goal to be carbon neutral by 2020.
- Expand adaptive management and robust inventory and monitoring.

Out of this integrated approach will emerge a new, landscape-level conservation approach for the Refuge System that will dovetail with the conservation community and the Service. By incorporating the best available science and more strategic planning, the Refuge System will be better suited to respond to climate change, identify additional opportunities for outdoor recreation and improve collaboration with partners.

Chapter 2: A Connected Conservation Constituency

The relevance of the Refuge System and the conservation movement is the primary focus of the second chapter of *Conserving the Future* (Recommendations 11-20). The work plans of the Community Partnerships; Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative; Communications; Hunting, Fishing, and Outdoor Recreation; and Interpretation and Environmental Education implementation teams enable the Service to work with partners to grow a conservation constituency. The teams plan to:

- Develop training; a “how to” handbook; and a web portal on creating and sustaining community partnerships, Friends organizations and volunteers.
- Define what excellent urban refuges provide, focusing on connecting urban Americans to the natural world.
- Partner with marketing professionals to craft a national marketing/communications plan for the Refuge System.
- Deploy social media tools, mobile apps and enhanced websites to make the Refuge System accessible with the click of a button.
- Work with states and partners to enhance hunting, fishing and more non-traditional recreation.
- Craft strategies for providing high quality interpretation and storytelling at national wildlife refuges and virtually, while educating a new generation of school kids about nature and wildlife refuges.

The key to the public stewardship, communications, and “the outside connection” themes of this chapter will be partnerships. Partners will help connect the Service with diverse populations, provide quality interpretative and educational services, and expand

the constituency that supports wildlife refuges. Conservation partners and Friends groups have an incredible opportunity to join with the Service to change how Americas interact with nature. We need more Americans excited about wildlife refuges and more hunters and anglers using public lands alongside wildlife photographers, hikers and bikers.

Chapter 3: Leading Conservation Into the Future

The charge of the vision's final chapter (*Recommendations 21-24*) is that of the Leadership Development Council (LDC), composed of a diverse body of Service leaders within and outside the Refuge System. The LDC will develop programs and policies to improve organizational excellence, enhance diversity and career development, provide leadership training at all levels, and enhance mentoring of the next generation of conservation leaders. Building on the leadership recommendations in *Fulfilling the Promise*, the LDC will:

- Create an evaluation team to report to the Service Directorate by November 2012 on opportunities for organizational realignments and programmatic efficiencies.
- Focus efforts to implement the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Diversity and Inclusion Implementation/Action Plan. Priority areas for implementation include recruitment, retention, outreach, and both internal and external communication.
- Evaluate leadership recommendations from *Fulfilling the Promise*.
- Prepare a report on developing and mentoring Service employees in the Refuge System with a focus on policies, programs and tools.

The LDC plans to use the website at <http://AmericasWildlife.org> to broach ideas and broaden the conversation about recommendations. Learn more about the LDC from its March 26 “In the Spotlight” blog on <http://AmericasWildlife.org/blog>.

Implementation Team Progress

The Implementation Plan for *Conserving the Future* was published on January 20, 2012, within the 90-day deadline set by Service Director Dan Ashe. The plan provides an overview of the implementation approach, a description of the implementation teams, a timeline, and information about reporting and communications. Download a copy at <http://AmericasWildlife.org/vision>. Major accomplishments of implementation to date include:

- Formation of nine Implementation Teams: Communications; Community Partnerships; Hunting, Fishing and Outdoor Recreation; Interpretation and Environmental Education; Leadership Development Council; Planning; Scientific Excellence; Strategic Growth; and Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative.

In the Spotlight – Stories from the front lines of implementation will be shared periodically in a featured called “In the Spotlight” on the blog at <http://AmericasWildlife.org/blog>. Here is an excerpt from the Planning Implementation Team spotlight.

Yogi Berra, the oft-quoted New York Yankees catcher, once said: “You got to be careful if you don’t know where you’re going, because you might not get there.”

Effective conservation planning has been, and will continue to be, essential for ensuring that the National Wildlife Refuge System knows where it’s going and meets its commitment to conserving fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for future generations of Americans...



To read the rest of the story, go to <http://AmericasWildlife.org/blog> or scan this QR code on a smart phone.

- Completion of work plans for all 24 recommendations.
- Hiring a full-time Implementation Coordinator.
- Conducting meetings with partner organizations, Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) councils, and various teams.

The Implementation Teams, with feedback from the Executive Implementation Council (EIC), have written a set of work plans, designed as blueprints on how the Service will implement the 24 recommendations. Copies of all the Implementation Team Work Plans are available online at <http://AmericasWildlife.org/vision> – just scroll down to the link for “Work Plans.” These plans contain a fair amount of detail and are an incredible source of information. For all teams, implementation has already begun, including creation of sub-teams to address their products and deliverables. All teams have stated an interest in working with partners, including the states. Several teams identified the need for GIS and mapping products. All teams recognize the importance of communication and many identified the need for training and mentoring programs. A few specific examples of accomplishments through the first quarter (January to April, 2012) include:

- In February and again in April, the Planning implementation team held meetings with partners that provided an opportunity to discuss Refuge System planning.
- The Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative implementation team is working with GIS specialists on a geo-spatial analysis and mapping exercise to show urban population centers, existing urban refuges and population growth.
- On April 13, the Community Partnerships implementation team sent refuge managers a survey to determine which refuges still need Friends organizations or community partnerships and what barriers exist.
- The Hunting and Fishing sub-team is conducting a draft inventory of hunting and fishing opportunities on refuges to begin developing a strategy for new opportunities.

- In February the Leadership Development Council interviewed members of the leadership teams from the *Fulfilling the Promise* and *Conserving the Future* efforts for ideas to take forward from their original work.
- In April, the Scientific Excellence implementation team convened a sub-team of modelers, biologists and managers to begin work on an information needs management system.
- Strategic Growth completed the first draft of its rapid assessment report on April 1.

Next Steps

All implementation teams have significant deliverables to meet in May, June and July 2012. By June, there will be draft strategies for communications, interpretation and education. An assessment of the Refuge System planning processes is scheduled to be complete in July, which is soon after a prioritization of land acquisition projects will be assembled. The Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative, through the help of partners, will start to take shape as standards of excellence are drafted and planning begins on an Urban Refuge Summit for spring of 2013. For a detailed list of Implementation Team deliverables, look to the Implementation Team Work Plans posted at <http://AmericasWildlife.org/vision> and the Implementation Plan for *Conserving the Future* (page 5 includes an Implementation Timeline of all the deliverables from the Implementation Team charters). Follow the progress of implementation from <http://AmericasWildlife.org> and submit your ideas for implementation to conservingthefuture@fws.gov.

Communications and Engagement

The process of building the *Conserving the Future* vision was one of the most transparent that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has undertaken. Now, the Refuge System has adopted a similar level of transparency during implementation:

- **AmericasWildlife.org** – Through a partnership with the National Wildlife Refuge Association, the Service will continue to maintain this website as a one-stop portal for information about implementation. Be sure to check the blog at <http://AmericasWildlife.org/blog> for stories

about the progress of implementation.

- **Refuge Update and Friends Forward** – During 2012, these publications will continue to have regular features and cover stories on the status of implementation and narratives from the field about *Conserving the Future* on the ground.
- **Social Media** – Accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Flickr can be accessed from home page at <http://AmericasWildlife.org>. Just click on the social media icons in the upper right hand corner. You can also follow the social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter for the National Wildlife Refuge System for a double dose of great wildlife and vision related updates.

In the first phases of implementation, there have been incredible benefits from maintaining open communications and transparency. After the *Conserving the Future* Conference, more than 13,300 people visited AmericasWildlife.org (which has about 2,400 members in the website's social network). More than half of those visitors are new. Activity on the Facebook page has increased more than 8% in the first quarter (January to April 2012) with an increase in the number of posts published and a conversion to the new Facebook timeline format. A similar increase has been seen for the @americaswild handle on Twitter.

Process Milestones

July 11-14, 2011 – The *Conserving the Future* Conference in Madison, Wisconsin: About 1,100 conservationists joined this historic gathering along with hundreds of online participants. View the conference archives at <http://AmericasWildlife.org/conference>

October 20, 2011 – The final vision document – *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation* – is published online

January 2012 –

- Implementation Plan for *Conserving the Future* is released January 20 within the 90-day deadline set by U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe
- Nine implementation teams are formed
- 10,000 paperback copies of the vision document are distributed to Service employees, partners and Friends organizations

February 2012 – Communications for implementation gets into high gear; increasing the content on AmericasWildlife.org website and social media on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr

March 2012 – Executive Implementation Council meets to discuss draft work plans

Engagement Checklist –To make sure you are connected with the latest news about implementation:

- Join the social network on the AmericasWildlife.org website.
- “Follow” / “Like” / “Subscribe” to AmericasWildlife.org on social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr.
- Join the mailing list for the newsletters *Refuge Update* or *Friends Forward* (Download past publications at <http://fws.gov/refuges>).
- Talk with co-workers, Friends organizations, partners, and your community about *Conserving the Future* and implementation (Download fact sheets and sample presentations at <http://americaswildlife.org/extras/fact-sheets/>).
- Email ideas to conservingthefuture@fws.gov.

Daily:

- Check Facebook.com and Twitter.com for photos, stories and updates.
- Share content through social media.

At Regular Intervals:

- Read the latest news stories on the blog at <http://AmericasWildlife.org/blog>.
- Read the news story and *Conserving the Future* focus articles in *Refuge Update* (Download the latest edition online at <http://fws.gov/refuges>).
- Read the feature article on vision implementation in *Friends Forward* (Download the latest edition online at <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/Friends/>).
- Download the quarterly Progress Reports for implementation from <http://AmericasWildlife.org> (April, July, October, 2012; January 2013).

April 2012 –

- A full-time Implementation Coordinator is hired in the Refuge System
- Implementation Team Work Plans for all 24 recommendations in *Conserving the Future* are finalized and posted online

